

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHRENAKOSMIAN SOCIETY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE,

AT

THEIR EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION,

FEBRUARY 22, 1839.

BY

OVID F. JOHNSON.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

GETTYSBURG.

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1839.

Pennsylvania College, February 23d, 1839.

TO OVID F. JOHNSON, ESQ.

Dear Sir:—We the committee of the Phrenakosmian Society, in its behalf, cheerfully tender you its sincere thanks for your very interesting and very eloquent address, delivered before it last evening, and respectfully solicit a copy for publication.

Yours, truly,

D. A. S. EYSTER,
N. H. CORNEL,
J. A. BROWN,
C. L. BAKER,
SAMUEL SOHL,

Committee of Arrangement.

Gettysburg, February 23d, 1839.

GENTLEMEN:—In compliance with the polite and flattering request communicated to me by your note of this date, I cheerfully furnish you with a copy of the address delivered by me, last evening, to be disposed of as you may think proper. In doing so, I have only to regret, that ill health and the performance of other duties, have prevented me from devoting to its preparation the attention necessary to render it more worthy of your acceptance. To the Phrenakosmian Society, and to yourselves individually permit me to return my sincere thanks, for the kindness and hospitality with which I have been greeted during my brief sojourn in this place.

I am, with respect,

Gentlemen, yours,

OVID F. JOHNSON.

TO MESSRS. D. A. S. EYSTER, N. H. CORNEL,

J. A. BROWN, C. L. BAKER, SAMUEL SOHL.

Committee of Arrangement.

ADDRESS.

THE ultimate object of all human knowledge, is to promote the happiness of man. In the attainment of this end, various subordinate means are employed, by the wise Author of our being; but they all spring directly or indirectly from the great purpose which I have just indicated. If man could exist independently in a state of nature, it would be no less true, in regard to his acquisition of knowledge, than it is when applied to him in his social relations. That condition denominated *human happiness*, depends on so many circumstances, difficult to simplify, to combine and comprehend, and frequently characterized by such inexplicable incongruities, as to render it no easy task to penetrate and unfold the fundamental principles on which it must be explained. But, however impracticable this may sometimes be, we can safely assume, that the chief element in the combination, is knowledge.

In our individual capacities, the nature of our physical enjoyments is dictated and regulated by the standard of our knowledge. Our moral and intellectual endowments are estimated by the same rule; while in our political relations of government and citizen, every civil and religious immunity is its immediate offspring, and must rely on it as the only sure guarantee of its existence. If there be any ap-

parent exceptions to the principle stated, a candid examination will remove every difficulty, and reconcile every supposed contradiction.

From this view of the subject, the conclusion necessarily follows, that the age and nation most distinguished for the general dissemination of intelligence, among the great mass of society, will also be most distinguished for the happiness which that mass will enjoy. It must be observed that I speak in reference to the knowledge of the mass of community, not of that of the few brilliant and learned men of distinction, found in most civilized nations of the present day, for it would be easy to cite examples to prove, that, in those nations where the great mass has been plunged in the grossest ignorance, some of the most celebrated names in the history of literature and science have beamed forth with transcendent lustre. It might not be venturing too far to assert, that an entire people may collectively possess a degree of general, solid, useful knowledge, without any individual among them being pre-eminently distinguished, far greater than other nations boasting some of the noblest names in the annals of science. It requires but little argument to show, in which of these nations popular wisdom most abounds. The difference is as manifest, as it is between the light of noonday and that of midnight irradiated with here and there a glimmering star.

The present age is, beyond all ages that have preceded it, characterized by the general dissemination of useful knowledge among the great mass of mankind. It is true we find no Platos, Aristotles, Baccos, Lockes, or Newtons, standing high above their

fellow men; but we can boast far superior advantages—we possess the immortal works of those men—our students master, in a few years of their scholastic studies, great scientific truths and discoveries, that employed their genius and their labours for a great portion of their lives. We have nations enlightened—we have governments reared on the true basis of wisdom and liberty—we have the benign spirit of Christianity lighting its altars in the wilderness, illuminating the homes of the heathen, and unfurling the banner of universal truth, peace, and mercy, on every hill-top, and in every valley, between the equator and the poles.

Intimately connected with this striking characteristic of the present age, is another consideration of no small influence on the happiness and advancement of the human race. I refer to the elevation of the common standard of social, political, moral, and intellectual excellence, resulting from this general diffusion of intelligence. Without attempting to draw flattering or partial contrasts in favour of the present age, I may be permitted to assert, what all history will sanction, that in each of these respects there has been wrought, in modern times, a marked and undoubted improvement. Society in all its various relations is more frank, generous and sincere—the political rights of man are better understood and guarded from infringement—morality is purer and more practical, and in his intellectual character, the unpretending citizen has assumed a higher, bolder, and more enlightened standing, than at any former age of the world. Among our European ancestors, it was once a merit, conferring especial personal immunities, to

be able to read and write. Now the inability to do so, is near akin to disgrace. It is scarcely two centuries since the Bible was a sealed book, to all save the learned few. Now, in every civilized community, its contents are almost as free and as accessible to popular acquisition, as the air of heaven. It is within the remembrance of some now living, that the rulers of nations were generally supposed to be commissioned for that office by *divine right*, which it was impious to question, and to be wholly independent of the communities under their dominion. Now, the great principle is irreversibly established, that man can rule himself, and that governments are instituted solely for the safety and happiness of the governed.

When we survey the history of the world, the rise and fall of recent nations and empires, the dawn and accelerated advance of science and the arts, the dissemination of the pure and holy principles of our religion, purged alike from bigotry and superstition, we must, as Americans, feel animated by that proud consciousness which the agency of our own country, in accomplishing these grand results, so justly inspires. It is now beyond the reach of "mortal ken" to ascertain what would have been the present state of the world, had this western continent never been discovered. We can, it is true, return to the day when Columbus weighed anchor, and, with hope and courage alone for his guides, steered westward across the trackless ocean. What was the condition of the civilized nations of the world at that day? Shrouded in darkness, with but enough of intellectual light flickering from the cloisters and monasteries, to ren-

der the mental gloom deeper and more hopeless. The sun of science had just shed its first beams of twilight in the eastern horizon. The dreariness of a midnight of ten centuries, was but beginning to pass away. Superstition and bigotry, both religious and political, held the mind of man in abject bondage, and extorted obedience by the rack of the inquisition, and the axe of the executioner.

The charmed circle was at length crossed. Columbus revealed a new world, to arouse the cupidity and to awaken the dormant energies of the old. The impulse was irresistible. Mankind with a bolder, firmer, faster pace, have since been pressing onward in improvement. The art of printing gave wings to science, and the down-trodden feudatories of Europe at last learned that knowledge, and not the sword, must shiver into fragments the rods and chains of their oppressors.

The new world became the field in which the ardent, enterprizing, and ambitious, sought fortunes and honours—and the refuge in which the victims of religious and civil domination found protection and repose. Hither came communities of emigrants from all the European nations, who brought with them the useful knowledge of the times, with spirits that defied danger, and laughed hardship to scorn. Such were the bold, hardy, inflexible pilgrim fathers, who first sat foot on Plymouth's bleak rock. Such were the founders of Jamestown, of New York, of Baltimore, and of our own beloved commonwealth. Such, in a word, were all the first settlers of the new world, who preferred the dangers and the hardships of the wilderness, to the quiet and comforts of the old world, crouching beneath the sway of its masters.

The principles and the feelings they brought with them, took deep root in the virgin soil of America, and, in spite of all efforts made to crush and restrain them,

“Have rooted more firmly, the fiercer assail’d.”

Differing in unimportant particulars from each other, all the States of this Union have, in the general great essential principles of freedom, enterprise, and public spirit, been one and the same. Separated from each other by native rivers and mountains only, they are separated from Europe by the broad ocean; and against foreign influence and aggression have been ever united as one family. In the war of Independence, and in the late war, the stars and stripes of our country floated over the heads of one people, united in brotherhood against the common foe. One freedom, one constitution, one destiny, has been their motto; and the glory of Lexington, Bunker Hill, Yorktown, New Orleans, and the thousand victories on the ocean, have been our common inheritance and common fame.

Venerating all the States of the Union with that deep and ardent feeling which ought to warm every true American heart, I must still, as my own birth-place, the home of my friends and my affections, turn to Pennsylvania, the acknowledged “Keystone” of the Federal Arch, as the especial patron of justice, of freedom, and of religious toleration; whose example has been to the sister States and to the world as “the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day,” to lead mankind in the march of liberation. It is with no ordinary pride and pleasure we can point to her example, and to that of her sons, as illustrative of the

sentiment of our American poet, expressed in terms as poetically beautiful as the principle is philosophically true:—

“The green sunny glade and the smooth flowing fountain,
Brighten the home of the coward and slave,
The flood and the forest, the rock and the mountain,
Rear on *their bosoms*, the free and the brave.”

It will not, I flatter myself, be either an unpleasant or unprofitable consumption of our time, to dwell somewhat at length on the incidents connected with the political history of Pennsylvania. The name of the excellent institution with which you are associated—the seat of its location—the birth-place and residence of a majority of those whom I have the honor to address, all conspire to make this commonwealth first in interest to most of us, and to impart to its history, and the principles of its government, a value which cannot be readily over-estimated. From this inquiry, however brief it be, let us hope that something may result, which will teach us the means by which Pennsylvania has attained her present exalted position in the Union, and by which, too, that position may not only be permanently secured from successful rivalry, but be still more elevated and improved. Should I succeed in contributing aught to produce this end, I shall feel that, to that extent at least, I have performed my duty.

On glancing the eye over the wide territory of Pennsylvania, and beholding her million and a half of active and prosperous citizens, her flourishing and increasing towns and cities, her grand system of internal improvements, her free and equal laws, her schools and colleges dispensing education with equal

bounty, to the children of the rich and the poor, the inquiry naturally presents itself, how have all these blessings been showered on a people whose ancestors, but a century and a half ago, fled from the tyranny of Europe, and without money, armies or power, pitched their tents in the wilderness, where their ears were greeted with no welcome, save the war whoop of the savage and the yell of the panther.

Among the first settlers of this colony, we find no men of great wealth or distinction. William Penn alone of the number, was known to the English nation as a man of letters, and a leading member of a despised and persecuted sect. His followers were men of moderate fortunes, unblemished lives, and humble names. They came not to subdue the natives by force, but to conciliate them by kindness and justice: not to deprive them of their country, but to find a country of their own. With a reach of forecast hardly paralleled in the history of the world, Penn laid the foundations of this government on principles of justice so deep, and of freedom so broad and universal, that it immediately became the refuge of the oppressed of all nations and kindreds. At a single blow he obliterated ancient prejudices, and gave to the people a charter of rights which shook the foundation of every despot's throne.

It was speedily foretold, that his universal toleration of all religions would overturn Christianity; that his ample provision for general education, would confound all ranks and orders in society; that his principles of political liberty would end in anarchy and misrule, and his unqualified justice in lawless rapine. Thanks be to the truth of nature, and the

wisdom of Penn, these predictions have been falsified: liberty has vindicated her own character, and forever put to shame those who dare doubt the capacity of man for self-government.

The comprehensive foresight of our first law-giver is clearly shown by every measure he adopted. The very plot of the city of Philadelphia, proves how far and how justly he penetrated the future. Under the government he founded, he well knew that a numerous people of great commercial business would spring up and flourish. He prepared for its reception, more than a century before it arose. He measured the numbers and fixed limits to the business of generations unborn. So wisely and so truly did he foresee all that was to happen, that little was left to chance.

The improvement and prosperity of the State have been, in a great measure, the result of Penn's calculation. Schools and seminaries of learning were coeval with its settlement. Public squares, state-houses, wharfs and harbors, were marked out in the midst of the forest, and printing presses began to scatter light abroad, while the lofty trees of the wilderness still stood in the main streets of Philadelphia. The first daily newspaper printed on this continent, was issued in that city, and the first literary periodical had its origin in the same place. Prior to the revolutionary war, about five hundred books and pamphlets were published in Pennsylvania, most of them written by citizens of the colony; a number greater, it is believed, than were published in any other of these colonies, and perhaps equal to, or greater, than in all the others combined. The scientific labours of our Franklin,

Rittenhouse, Godfrey and others, had conferred immortality on American genius ; and in the reformation of jurisprudence, whoever will take the trouble to examine our statute books, will find that the legislature of Pennsylvania has been the great pioneer, not only in abolishing idle forms, alike repugnant to reason and common sense, but in blotting out cruelty from our penal code, and in subserving strict justice by rescuing the poor and unfortunate from the grasp of the harsh and unfeeling. In some of the most important laws for the protection of the poor and friendless from oppression, on account of the passage of which the English parliament and ministry have been justly extolled, they but followed the lead of Pennsylvania in the cause of benevolence and justice, at a tardy pace of several years. The slave trade, the former reproach of the civilized world, suffered its earliest and heaviest blow from Pennsylvania ; and tyranny over the mind of man, whether political or religious, has sunk prostrate before the name, the principles and the example of Penn. Born and educated during the closing scenes of that bloody and eventful revolution in England, which ended in the establishment of the commonwealth, William Penn became thoroughly imbued with the principles of civil liberty, that had been so powerfully and profoundly elucidated by Milton, Hampden, and others ; and burning with the zeal that ever distinguishes noble natures, he embodied their principles in his first frame of government, and in all his institutions followed the examples of those great masters of the true principles of government whose reasonings had overturned the throne, and established on its ruins, in

theory at least, a free government. It had failed, it is true, but its failure had not shaken the confidence of Penn in the principles that upheld it. He saw that they were immortal, for truth was their foundation; and he resolved to give them a new and a fair trial, in the colony he planted here. The event has more than justified his confident expectations. In the language of Milton, "truth has grappled with error," and won the victory. British liberty perished; but, transferred to America, it gloriously survives and flourishes.

Though in his dealings with the Indians, William Penn followed the bright examples of Roger Williams and other time honored patriarchs of this country, he yet transcended them all, in the strict undeviating regard which he constantly paid to their rights, and meted out to them full and unqualified justice. He treated them as the rightful owners of the soil, and paid them honestly for every inch he purchased. He respected them as men, entitled to the immunities of human beings: Our early laws show his solicitude on this subject. The influence which he and his followers exerted over them, is abundant proof of the wisdom of his policy, and the name of the "Good Onas," is still pronounced with reverence, among the traditions of the nations who knew him. For this rude immortality, who would take in exchange, the united glory of ten thousand bloody Pizarros!

It is but simple truth to add, that the mild example of Penn towards the Indians, was not respected by all the inhabitants of his colony. The consequence was heart burnings and animosities, which sometimes

could neither be regulated nor allayed. In the main scope, however, of the conduct of Pennsylvania towards the Indians, we find little to condemn, much to approve, and perhaps we shall not err, if we attribute to no small extent, the early and successful settlement of our territory, to the fact, that justice and kindness had secured peace and harmony, between the natives and the whites.

In tracing the history of Pennsylvania up to the period of the revolution, although we find the government often in the hands of bad and incompetent men, often adopting measures adverse to the common good, often embarrassed and fluctuating in its policy, we nevertheless perceive the general current of her prosperity, rolling steadily on. The great principles of justice, of peace, and of liberty, which lay at the basis of her constitution, seemed to bear up against all difficulties, and carry society forward with an impulse that neither unfriendly power nor other obstacles could resist. The industry and frugality of her citizens, triumphed over the wants and hardships of the wilderness; enabled them to increase their means with unexampled rapidity; to prostrate the forests; rear towns and cities; construct roads and bridges, and make the "desert places blossom as the rose."

The same principles, the same public spirit, the same feelings, have unchangeably swayed her destinies, given character to her people and her institutions, since the 4th of July, 1776—and we can read in her history during the last ten years, the legitimate practical fruits of the great seminal principles, planted in 1681, by her illustrious founder.

In most, if not in all, of the other American colonies,

the Governors were appointed directly by the British Crown. They, of course, represented and enforced the wishes and interests of their employers. It was a cardinal maxim with the King of England and his Ministry, to plunder from the Colonies all they would yield under law, and against law, and to render in return for it the least possible degree of aid and protection.

Pennsylvania was generally free from these tyrannical exactions, and being under the dominion of Penn, or of those who were placed here to guard his rights and interests, it was naturally and justly expected that greater favors and inducements would be held out to settlers, than in those colonies under the immediate dominion of the tools of the King. This expectation, was in most cases realized, and hence no doubt in part the fact, of the rapid and steady advance of the early settlement of this colony, and the location here, of many learned and influential men, soon after its first occupancy by Penn and his followers. This characteristic liberality of the government of Pennsylvania, made a deep and lasting impression on the habits and feelings of the people, and the institutions they reared. That impression is bright and legible still—Time and corruption can alone efface it.

Much of her rapid advancement may also be attributed to a cause, which at first view, is calculated to awaken very different expectations. The mass composing her citizens, was at the outset and has been ever since, of a more mixed and less homogeneous character, than in any other state of the Union. The free and equal government of Pennsylvania presented a general invitation to all mankind. No matter from

what nation, from what clime, or of what religion, under her laws all found protection, repose and a home. Emigrants rushed in from all quarters—religious and political bickerings ceased, and with one accord all wrought together for the public weal.

Thus have been collected in one society, the arts, the industry, the knowledge and the rivalry of nearly every civilized nation. The mass has been quickened by the coalescing process of union, and the prosperity of the whole community been advanced beyond all former example—national predjudices and antipathies have been softened and neutralized, and the common object sought has been the promotion of the common good. To the same cause, doubtless, are to be ascribed in a good degree the facts, that while the great body of community has not been particularly distinguished for its intelligence, the measures of the government have been enlightened, liberal and wise, and also, that while at the commencement a large portion, perhaps a clear majority, was opposed to all internal improvements, the system was adopted by the Legislature, and boldly, constantly and successfully pushed forward in despite of all opposition.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to fix bounds to the enterprise and prosperity of a state which, like Pennsylvania, in addition to the native genius and public spirit of its sons, can boast the co-operation, among hundreds of others, of such men from other states and nations, as the Franklins, Wilsons, Gallatins and Girards. To Pennsylvania belongs the glory of first penetrating the interior of our country with turnpikes and canals. To her belongs the glory of originating the grand system, that has annihilated and is annihilating

time and space, and reducing the vast circuit of the territory of the Union, to a few days travel in extent. I have seen among the proceedings of her Legislature, half a century ago, all the principal lines of improvement that now thread our valleys, and cross our mountains, in all directions, distinctly marked out—the advantages foretold, and a recommendation of their being undertaken strongly urged. In what other state of our Union did this early spirit of improvement burst forth? In what other state of this Union, has this spirit so gloriously witnessed the triumph of its hopes, and its efforts over the prejudices of men, and the barriers of nature? What a striking exemplification does this afford of the truth, that “Knowledge is Power?” The great experiment has been tried—the victory has been won by truth—the fanciful theory of half a century ago, is now a sober practical fact. Every one of our canal boats and locomotive engines, bears evidence of the universal sway of knowledge, and of the far-reaching sagacity of the early pioneers of improvement. It is conclusive proof, too, that the chief ingredient of human happiness is human knowledge. In proof of this, let the myriads of flourishing towns and cities that occupy the place of the rude huts of the Indian and the hunter—let the millions of enlightened freemen who dwell in the ancient haunts of the savage and his game, answer the inquiry.

Since the declaration of independence, the people of this commonwealth have framed for themselves three constitutions of government, all founded on the immutable principles of civil and religious liberty—all wisely designed to preserve and secure the sacred rights of man. These several changes made without violence

or commotion, have only extended to the re-modeling of the details of the superstructure, and have left the foundation stone untouched. Our old constitution under which the state has prospered for near half a century—under which nine-tenths of the present generation were born and reared, has just been replaced by one, new in many particulars, with so great tranquility and quiet, that few save the officers whose tenure was affected, and the politicians of the day, knew or heeded the transaction. In Europe such an event as the change of our constitution, would have shaken all the established governments to the centre, and drenched nations in blood. What an irresistible argument is this in favor of republican government! How conformable to reason and to the improvements of the age, are its peaceful principles of change and renovation! The changes may be wise or unwise, if the majority will it, they are made, and time, the great reformer, sustains or condemns them.

The issue of our whole inquiry may be summed up in a few brief and simple propositions: That the constitution and government of Pennsylvania, resting on the broad basis of knowledge, justice and freedom, have been successfully established and triumphantly sustained, by the wisdom and intelligence of her founder and her citizens: That foresight, integrity, and public spirit characterized the fathers of this commonwealth, and have been cherished with becoming veneration to the present day: That the means whereby Pennsylvania attained her present exalted position among her sister states of the Union, must be steadily pursued henceforth, to fill the measure of her glory, and to retain, as she has ever commanded, the

respect and gratitude of all enlightened and good men: 'That those are her best citizens who contribute most to her civic renown, and that this consists in the virtue and knowledge of the great mass of her people, as the primary cause of every thing great and good in their character: Let improvement of her physical condition, education of her youth, faithful adherence to the Union of the states, and the national constitution, and morality and religion be fostered and cultivated by the present and succeeding generations, and her ancient name will not only be preserved undiminished, but she will win new laurels, and acquire an additional title to the admiration of the civilized world. Upon you, my brethren, and the generation just entering on the stage of life--with you, devolves this high duty. Let it be your pride and your ambition to perform it, with patriotic fidelity.

With these cursory, and as I am aware, imperfect glances at the political history of this Commonwealth, I must leave the subject to your own consideration: It is fraught with the deepest interest to every intelligent mind: It is emphatically, "philosophy teaching by example:" It fully attests the capacity of man to govern himself: It establishes the omnipotence of truth, justice and freedom in the contest against the combined alliance of ancient prejudice and modern theoretic innovation: It vindicates the empire of knowledge, and rescues the pure and holy religion of our Saviour, from the obloquy, dependence and contamination of all political association. Proudly, confidently and fearlessly, do I claim for Pennsylvania the high distinction of having asserted among the first of the sister states, and of having maintained beyond all

others, these great and glorious principles ; for defending which, Sydney and Russell perished on the scaffold, Penn was imprisoned again and again, Jefferson and his compatriots in the Congress of 1776; pledged to each other "their lives, fortunes and sacred honor," under the cannon's mouth, that we at this day, in this free and happy country might inherit them, as the rightful fruits of their courage, their sacrifices, their sufferings and their blood. God vouchsafe that we may guard the precious boon of civil and religious liberty, with the spirit and energy that animated our fathers who won it, and transmit it to our children as we received it from our ancestors, undiminished and unsullied.

Indulge me my brethren, in conclusion, with a few desultory, but not, I trust, inappropriate remarks on the present anniversary. If there be any consideration that should now add to the gratification, which must naturally arise from the flourishing condition and encouraging auspices cheering on our society, it is the circumstance, that in commemorating its anniversary, we also commemorate the birth day of the Father of his country. No day in the year more appropriate than this can be found, to lay the corner stone of an American literary society. In greeting its annual return, we cannot fail to associate with it, the memory of the man who was justly said to have earned a fame "whiter than it was brilliant," and to have been "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." His deeds, his sentiments, his example, all stand before his country, as models for every good man to study and venerate.

If it be true, as I have stated, that the primary end

of knowledge is to promote human happiness, then is that end most properly attained, in the acquisition of such knowledge as tends most directly to produce it, and where, let me ask, can we search for sounder instruction, or more infallible lessons of wisdom, except in the Scriptures alone, than are contained in the letters, addresses, and messages of Washington? Can you find in the profound disquisitions of the philosophers, or in the checkered pages of the historians of the ancients or the moderns, true wisdom, unspotted virtue and sincere religion more strongly exemplified in theory, than they were in practice, in the life and principles of this great and good man? The exalted characters of Theseus, Numa, Lycurgus, Solon, Trajan and Alfred, were but the faint, partial and shadowy outlines of that character still more exalted, which blazed forth full and perfect in our illustrious American Chieftain.

We borrow from the ancients and from Europe our professed literary taste, and to our eternal shame be it said, our caprices of criticism together with our canons of judgment. Our own authors must obtain a foreign endorsement, before they will pass current at home. Our fashions have the same origin, and it is to be feared, too much of our manners also. Our cooks and our tailors, must have been instructed abroad or at least by those who were, to be employed in this country. But in one respect, we are still independent of foreign influence and degenerate example—it is in the estimate we place on our patriots, statesmen and free institutions. Here we yield to no dictation. The name of Washington has not yet needed the plaudits of a foreign review to recommend it to the acceptance

